

# The Disability Examiner

Department of Human Services, Office of Rehabilitation Services, Disability Determination Services  
40 Fountain Street, Providence, Rhode Island 02903

## *Disability Determinations Services Consultative Examination Scheduling Unit*

*40 Fountain Street, Providence,  
RI 02903*

*401-222-3182*

*Deborah Cannon*

*Medical Professional Relations  
Officer, ext.259*

[Deborah.a.cannon@ssa.gov](mailto:Deborah.a.cannon@ssa.gov)

*Kathy Alegria, Scheduler,  
ext. 270*

[Kathy.alegria@ssa.gov](mailto:Kathy.alegria@ssa.gov)

*Erik Wohlgemuth, Scheduler  
Ext. 275*

[Erik.wohlgemuth@ssa.gov](mailto:Erik.wohlgemuth@ssa.gov)

## A message from the Deputy Administrator:

### Rhode Island DDS Attains Electronic Record Certification

On February 27, 2006 at 11:15 a.m. a formal proclamation was read by Ruby Burrell, Associate Commissioner of the Office of Disability Determinations, recognizing that the Rhode Island DDS has successfully achieved all the necessary milestones to become the 26<sup>th</sup> state authorized to complete disability adjudication in a solely electronic format. This accomplishment did not come easy. The process of migrating from a paper based system of record retention to an electronic system of medical record maintenance impacted every facet of the DDS operation. From case intake through adjudication, no job function remained the same. Every step of the office business process had to be analyzed and reviewed. Trainings and re-trainings were conducted as every staff had to learn a new way to perform their job. There were conference calls and meetings too numerous to count. Hardware changes and software changes that did not always go as planned became routine, resulting in many late nights and short weekends.

The implementation of the electronic disability process actually began on April 25, 2005 with four disability examiners and two medical consultants serving as the pilot group. Over the next 5 months the methodology was "rolled out" to all disability examiners, medical consultants, supervisors and quality assurance specialists. The status of being "rolled out" was accompanied by additional adjudicative burdens. For the disability examiner it meant that they had to keep dual folders (one paper and one electronic) on every electronic case, as the paper folder remained the official folder for programmatic purposes. For the QA Specialists and supervisors, it meant "validating" each folder at the point of closure to ensure that every document in the electronic folder had an exact matching document in the paper folder. These tasks were labor intensive and weighed on an already stressed staff.

The actual certification process was a two-stage evaluation of the RIDDS's ability to master and implement the systems of the electronic disability model. The first phase, The "Assessment Visit", was done during the week of December 20, 2005, and included an onsite, complete analysis of our business process. Each operational step of the business plan for all of our case processing units was reviewed for clarity and compliance with the electronic model. Also during the Assessment Visit there was a review of completed cases to evaluate the consistency between the paper and electronic folders. The second phase, the "Validation Visit" occurred during the week of February 19, 2006 and consisted of a comprehensive, page-by-page review of 150 completed cases to verify that there were not significant discrepancies between the paper folder and the electronic folder. The RIDDS folder discrepancy rate of 2% is believed to be the lowest of any certified state.

(Continued on page 4)

## Inside This Issue

- A Message from the Deputy Administrator
- Telephone Directory
- New Staff
- Reminder Items for Consultants
- Assessing Pain and Other Symptoms
- Calendar of Events

## Telephone Directory - Dial General Line (401) 222-3182 + Extension

### Administrative

John Microulis, Deputy Administrator 230

### Hearing Unit

Mario Pantano, Supervising Hearing Officer 260

Bob Goff, Hearing Officer 217

Donna Diraimo, Data Control Clerk 254

### Fiscal Unit

Marie Aharonian, Business Officer 262

Victoria Sequin, Reconciliation Clerk 269

### CE Scheduling/Medical Relations

Deborah Cannon, Professional Relations Office 259

Kathy Alegria, Scheduler 270

Erik Wohlgemuth, Scheduler 275

### FAX numbers

Fax Server 866-288-2847

Non CE –related Correspondence 401-222-3232

No shows (billing) 401-222-7601

Examiners 401-222-3868

### Transcription Service

Stone Network:

Dictation line: 1-800-221-3800

General Inquiries: 1-215-712-2400



## NO SHOWS

We do not need written reports for unattended appointments - Simply fax a bill with the notation "no show" to 401-222-7601

ATTN: Marie

### Examiners

#### Unit A

Dennis Thibert, Supervisor 233

Sue Mehlenbacher, Quality Assurance Specialist 235

Cindy DeRobbio 248

Philip DiDomenico 215

Cathie Hood 207

Maryfrances McVay 247

Dawn Noel 220

Richard Rosenthal 212

Nancy Tasca 244

#### Unit B

Marie Boucher, Supervisor 241

Maggie Cotter, Quality Assurance Specialist 227

Karen Harvey 221

Karen Lowell 220

Deidre Joseph 214

Cari Petrella 225

Beth Rioles 216

Barbara Rubin 266

Stacey Selton 245

Jeanne St. Michel 273

#### Unit C

Kathy Brown, Supervisor 250

Jillian Rivers, Quality Assurance Specialist 223

Joelle DiDomenico 213

Christine Hammond 226

Anne Marie Izzi 219

Philip Lowry 213

Jennifer Munroe 231

Carol Oulette 264

Paula Richardson 234

Xang Xiong 240

## WELCOME



The Rhode Island DDS would like to welcome Karen Lowell to the agency. Ms. Lowell was recently appointed to the position of Rehabilitation Counselor and started working for DDS as a claims examiner on February 6, 2006. Ms. Lowell has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology from Rhode Island College and has been employed by the State of Rhode Island since 2001 as a Social Caseworker II within the Department of Children Youth and Families. Prior to state employment she worked at a community based human service program where she held a supervisory position and was involved in assisting clients who applied for SSDI, SSI and Medicare. She also has long term work experience as a vocational coordinator with a special needs population.

Ms. Lowell possesses the energy, persistence and interpersonal skills needed to succeed in the position of Rehabilitation Counselor at the DDS. We wish her well.

### CE Panel Recruitment

The DDS is currently looking for neurologists, pediatricians, internal medicine physicians and hearing and speech pathologists (particularly in the South County area) to perform consultative examinations. If you can spare more time to accept additional referrals from the DDS or if you know someone who may be interested in joining our Panel of Consultative Physicians and Psychologists please call or e-mail Deb Cannon.

## Comments/Suggestions

The first edition of the *Disability Examiner* was released mid-February (a little later than we had hoped) and we received quite a few responses to the newsletter. Many consultants thought the content was helpful. We even received a few suggestions for topics that should be included in future editions. We would like to thank all the consultants who provided feedback. In order for this to be a useful tool, feedback is essential. Thank you again and keep your comments and suggestions coming.



## Consultative Examination Panelists

Over the last year, the RI Disability Determination Service has added several new consultants to the Consultative Examination Panel.

We would like to formally welcome the following consultants to the panel:

Michael Hayden, D.O.  
[Joseph Alessi, MD, East Providence Medical](#)  
 Pradeep Chopra, MD, Southern New England  
 Anesthesia and Pain Associates  
[East Side Clinical Lab of Westerly](#)  
 Michael Vignona, MD  
[Robert McKittrick, MD, Midland Medical](#)  
 Carlos I. Perez-Benitez, Ph.D.  
[Kevin Fontaine, Ph.D., Psychological Counseling](#)  
[and Testing in Wickford](#)  
 Steven Croce, O.D., Croce and Pugliese Vision  
 Care  
[John Pugliese, O.D, Croce and Pugliese Vision Care](#)  
 Tracy O'Leary Tevyaw, Ph.D.



## Reminder Items for Consultants

- The Social Security Administration requires that all signed CE reports be sent to the DDS by electronic format (fax or e-data upload). The DDS will no longer provide business reply envelopes and will no longer accept signed CE reports by postal mail. Please contact Deb Cannon at 222-3182 x 259 (or by e-mail at [deborah.a.cannon@ssa.gov](mailto:deborah.a.cannon@ssa.gov)) for more information.
- The signed copy of your CE report must be received within 15 working days of the exam for full payment. **(Late reports are reduced by \$15.)**
- We no longer need no-show reports. Simply fax a bill for a no show to 401-222-7601. If you use the Electronic Medical Website ([eme.ssa.gov](http://eme.ssa.gov)), you can report no shows by using the **send no show response** link and fax the bill to the above number.

## Rhode Island DDS Attains Electronic Record Certification

(Continued from page 1)

The certification is now complete, but significant challenges still exist. At the forefront is the task of educating and assisting the medical community in submission of medical records in the electronic format. The message needs to be spread that the electronic process is full of benefits for the DDS, the medical providers and our respective claimants and patients. The DDS now has electronic files as opposed to book shelves and file cabinets crowded with overstuffed folders. Multiple individuals are now able to view medical records from various locations at the same time. The worry over paper folders being "lost" or destroyed is eliminated as we can recreate folders in situations of power outages or other disasters. (At the Louisiana DDS, electronic folders survived Hurricane Katrina; the paper folders did not). The immediacy of the electronic submission allows for quick action on time sensitive adjudications as the preferred methods of delivery (faxing or using our secure website) result in documents being accessible in the electronic folder within seconds of transmission. We have only touched the surface in regards to the beneficial aspects or processing disability claims electronically.

I am proud of the effort and achievements of the RIDDS staff and community. We will continue to work diligently to process disability claims using the most efficient tools available and will eagerly assist any medical provider who wants to become part of the electronic medical records process.

John Microulis  
Deputy Administrator  
Rhode Island Disability Determination Services

## Consultative Examination Milestone

In February 2005 the RIDDS began using an electronic CE ordering process. We rolled it out a few examiners at a time until all examiners were using the electronic process. The impact has been very positive. It has expedited CE scheduling and allows supervisors the opportunity review available evidence in file prior to authorizing the request. We have recently reached a milestone; 10,000 electronically requested Consultative Exams. Disability examiner Barbara Rubin ordered the 10,000<sup>th</sup> consultative examination, Marie Boucher, her supervisor, approved the electronic consultative examination order, and Erik Wohlgemuth scheduled the examination Wendy Schwartz, Ph.D.

*Congratulations to everyone!!!*

## Assessing Pain and Other Symptoms

In determining disability the DDS considers all symptoms (including pain, shortness of breath, fatigue, weakness, nervousness, etc.), and the extent to which these symptoms can be reasonably associated with objective medical sign, laboratory findings, and other evidence. "Other evidence" includes:

- the claimant's or treating/examining source's statements
- reports about the claimant's medical history;
- Diagnosis;
- Prescribed treatment;
- Daily activities;
- Efforts to work and impact on his/her ability to work.

Statements about the claimant's symptoms alone will not establish disability. There must exist a medically determinable impairment that could be reasonably expected to produce these symptoms which, when considered with all of the other evidence, would lead to a conclusion that the claimant is disabled.

As an examining source, consultants are often requested to evaluate the intensity and duration of the claimant's symptoms, such as pain, fatigue, shortness of breath, nervousness, etc.

When evaluating symptoms, the examining source should:

- Assess whether there are medical signs and laboratory findings to establish a medically determinable impairment which can be reasonably expected to produce alleged symptoms;
- Assess how the symptoms affects the claimant's daily activities;
- Describe the location, duration, frequency and intensity of the claimant's symptoms;
- Describe precipitating and aggravating factors;
- Describe the type, dosage, effectiveness, and side effects of any medication the claimant takes or may have taken to alleviate the symptoms;
- Describe treatment other than medication the claimant receives or has received to relieve the symptoms;
- Describe any measures the claimant uses or has used to alleviate the symptoms (e.g., lying flat on his/her back, standing for 15-20 minutes per hour sleeping on a bed board, etc.); and
- Describe other factors concerning the claimant's functional limitations and restrictions due to his/her symptoms.



### Important Fax Information

When Faxing CE reports to our fax server: **Remember you must use the bar coded cover page as the first page followed by the CE report.** **PLEASE DO NOT USE YOUR OWN COVER SHEET.** The fax server number is:

**1-866-288-2847**

When faxing non CE related correspondence please use the following fax number:

**401-222-3232**

**\*\*\*\*\*Fax bills for missed appointments to: 401-222-7601\*\*\*\*\***

# Calendar of Events

## STATE HOLIDAYS

Independence Day

July 4, 2006

Victory Day

August 14, 2006

## Summer Scheduling

Before we know it, summer will be here. For many that means vacations and decreased work hours. If you are a consultant who utilizes "block scheduling" it would be greatly appreciated if you could provide us with a summer schedule as soon as possible. If you do not currently use block scheduling and would like more information, give us call.

## Thank You

The Rhode Island DDS would like to thank and recognize everyone who attended the Rhode Island Psychological Association continuing education workshop, "New Practice Opportunities for Psychologists: Consultative Services for the Disability Determination Services Program". It was great to see so many familiar faces and to meet so many new providers from the community. We appreciated the opportunity to speak with you regarding the consultative services and opportunities available at the Rhode Island DDS. A special thanks is extended to Dr. Clifford I. Gordon, whose hard work made the workshop a success.

If you would like to receive The Disability Examiner by e-mail,  
Contact Deb Cannon  
[Deborah.a.cannon@ssa.gov](mailto:Deborah.a.cannon@ssa.gov)

The Newsletter can also be accessed on-line at [www.ors.ri.gov](http://www.ors.ri.gov)  
And selecting the *Disability Examiner*  
Link on the Disability Determination Services drop down menu

### JUNE 2006

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	

### JULY 2006

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

### AUGUST 2006

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

NOTES:

This image shows a full page of blank, lined paper. It features approximately 28 evenly spaced horizontal black lines running across the width of the page, typical of notebook or legal stationery. The background is a solid off-white color. There are no margins, text, or other markings present.

Department of Human Services  
Office of Rehabilitation Services  
Disabilty Determination Services  
40 Fountain Street  
Providence, RI 02903